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ON FOREIGN BODIES IN THE NOSE, EAR, AND EYE.

"These things should not be neglected; they are least of all to be neglected by one who thinks an attention to the common and humble duties of the profession more commendable, more becoming, more like good sense and sound judgment, than a passion for bloody operations and extraordinary cures."

CHILDREN sometimes insinuate peas so far into the nose, that they remain there; and, swelling by the moisture of the part, excite considerable pain, and are even troublesome to remove. Similar foreign bodies getting into the ear cause great distress. Hildanus relates a case of a glass bead lodging undiscovered in the ear of a child, and producing, for *several years*, a great variety of suffering, including even convulsions. Insects, sometimes, though very seldom, creep into the ear, and cause much alarm. This would be a very frequent occurrence, were not a particular provision made by nature for preventing their intrusion. The orifice is surrounded by numerous fine hairs, which point towards the centre of the passage; and these entangle the limbs of the insect, and stop its progress. The sides of this passage are also lined with a coating of small glands that secrete the ear-wax, which, being a very bitter substance, is noxious to most insects; for however salutary bitters may be to man, and quadrupeds, they are in general poisonous to insects. The infusion, or decoction of quassia, for instance, is often employed to poison flies. This then, is the use of the ear-wax; it is poisonous and disagreeable to most insects, and stops their ingress to the ear. Still, they do occasionally find entrance; and when they are in the auditory passage, their motions, and the sound of their wings, are truly frightful. There is no fear, however, of their getting *beyond* the external passage; for the entrance to the *internal ear* is closed by the strong membrane of the tympanum, or drum, which forms a complete partition between the two.

When an insect is lodged in the ear, if it cannot be turned out with a tooth-pick, a pencil, a pen, a bodkin, or any other convenient instrument, it may be destroyed by pouring a little oil into the ear; or, if oil be not at hand, spirits, wine, vinegar, or even water, will answer. If spirits be used, the ear should be washed out afterwards, to prevent inflammation.

A very common error has long prevailed respecting the supposed danger of the earwig. Every one is acquainted with

this despised insect, which is an object of general abhorrence. This may have arisen partly from its outward appearance, and the threatening aspect of its forcipated tail, which seems to menace the beholder; but it may have originated also from the prevalent persuasion, that it creeps into the ear, and thence penetrates to the brain. This, however, like the calumnies heaped from time immemorial on the toad, as innocent a creature as crawls the earth, is totally unfounded; and were the history of the earwig generally understood, possibly some sympathy even for it might be entertained. On this account, I shall enumerate one or two points in its economy.

Scarcely any animal seems less fitted for flight than the earwig, and yet it does fly in the night. Its *wing-cases* are very small, and the wings are so beautiful, and packed up in such narrow compass underneath the wing-cases, as to have excited the admiration of every investigator of the phenomenon.\* The parental solicitude of the domestic hen is well known and appreciated; yet it does not surpass that of the earwig. In April the eggs of this insect may be found under stones, and the mother may be observed to attend them with the strongest maternal affection. If they be scattered about, she never rests till she has collected them, one by one; and when the young are produced, she broods over them, as a hen does over the chickens gathered beneath her wings. Farther observations on the earwig might here be irrelevant, and would at any rate, I fear, go a very little way in exciting a kindly and merciful feeling towards it.—The earwig, then, has no power of penetrating to the *internal* ear, not to mention the brain. The notion, indeed, is too ridiculous to require a moment's consideration from any one properly acquainted either with the insect, the ear, or the bone in which the organ of hearing is situated. The earwig may have occasionally crept into the ear of a person who has fallen asleep on the ground; just as a flea creeps now and then, into the ear of a person sleeping in bed. This, however, is merely an accidental occurrence, and is serious only in consequence of the fright it occasions; for even so small an insect as a flea getting into the organ, causes great disturbance; and hence, I suppose, originates the common saying, when a person is dismissed with an answer, or greeting, very unexpected and unpleasant, that he has been sent off, *with a flea in his ear*. Perhaps, too, earwigs more readily enter the ears than other insects; owing chiefly to their love of *hiding*, in consequence of which they are sometimes caught in plenty in gardens, by placing the bowl of a tobacco-pipe on a perpendicular stick, into

\* See an account, and a magnified view of the wing of the earwig, in "Adams on the Microscope."

which they creep, and are taken. But farther than simply entering the ear, as into a hiding place, they are perfectly innocent. They have not the slightest power of committing mischief; and their forked tail, which has not the semblance of being offensive, is altogether harmless. The insect, indeed, often makes apparent attempts to defend itself with this instrument; yet, as Goldsmith observes, these "are only the threats of impotence; they draw down the resentment of powerful animals, but in no way serve to defend it."

The intrusion of foreign bodies within the eyelids, is an accident of much more serious consequence, and more frequent occurrence than those just noticed. All are aware how sensible an organ the eye is; but the exact seat of its sensibility is, I believe, by no means generally understood. The smallest mote, a grain of sand almost invisible, getting into the eye, produces severe pain, a discharge of tears, and inflammation. Yet, in various operations on the eyeballs,—for example, in operating for cataract,—so far is the patient from complaining of pain, when the knife cuts through one half of the cornea, or the cataract needle is plunged into the middle of the eye, that even children undergo these operations, frequently without giving a whine. Adults describe the sensation produced by cutting the cornea,\* in extraction of cataract, as being like to a hair drawn across the eye. These and various other observations prove that the eyeball, when not inflamed, is nearly insensible; and the full explanation of this, discloses one of the finest examples of the excelling wisdom with which our frame has been constructed. The eyeball, in its natural state, is insensible, or nearly so; what then would be the consequence, were there no guard to warn us of the presence of foreign bodies in the eye?—Why; that in innumerable instances the organ would be irreparably injured before pains were taken to remove the offending cause. What would a thoughtless sailor care though a dozen motes were in his eye, if they gave him no uneasiness? And what would the bricklayer, the blacksmith, or the people of fifty other trades, care about them? There is, however, a guard given to the eye, which *obliges* us to attend to the intrusion of the slightest particle of foreign matter, whether we will or not. This guard consists in an extreme, though peculiar sensibility in the organ, which will not allow it to bear the slightest irritation. This is familiar to every one's experience. I have just said that the eye is possessed of *extreme sensibility*, though, a little before, I stated that it is *nearly insensible*. This may appear inconsistent. But I shall give an explanation from

\* The anterior transparent part of the eye, which is to it, what the crystal is to a watch, a window for admitting light.

much higher authority than my own, in the words of one of the first Surgeons in London, who states it thus:—

“ Public opinion, which on medical subjects is generally erroneous, although for the most part founded on professional authority, is in no instance more injurious than in relation to the eye. It pronounces it to be an organ of a very delicate nature, exquisitely sensible, requiring the greatest delicacy of touch, and the utmost nicety of management; which some oculists formerly found it convenient to support, and which the public may still continue to believe, without any great disadvantage; but students in surgery must be taught otherwise. They must learn that the eye is not a delicate organ, that it will suffer more comparative violence, with less injury, than any other of importance in the whole body; that, so far from being exquisitely sensible, it is, when exposed in a healthy state, nearly the reverse, only becoming permanently so on the occurrence of inflammation; and that the ablest, and most successful operators are neither the most gentle nor the most tender in their proceedings. The opinion of the exquisite sensibility of the eye has arisen from the pain which is felt on the admission of a small piece of dirt, or a fly, between the eyelids; but, this occurs from a wise and preservative provision of nature, on account of the insensibility of the eyeball itself. Let the eyelid be raised, and the same piece of dust applied to the surface of the eye, no pain, and scarcely a sensation, will be produced: remove the piece of dirt, turn out the lid, and whilst it is retained everted, place the piece of dirt upon it, no greater sensation will be induced than is felt when it is applied to the eyeball. The inference is, that both surfaces, when touched separately, are nearly insensible to this species of irritation. But let the same piece of dirt be put between the eyelid and the eyeball, and the sensation produced is exquisitely painful. To give rise to this sensation, it is necessary that the two surfaces should come in contact, *and that the foreign body be grasped between them.* If this were not the case, an irreparable injury would often occur to the transparent part of the eye, before it would be observed; and if the raising of the lid and the separation of the surfaces did not nearly annul sensation, an operation could not be performed for cataract; for who could bear quietly the sensation which must arise from pushing a needle into the eye, if it were analagous to that arising from a fly, or dry solid substance, between the eye and the lids? The experiment may be tried in a very simple and conclusive manner, by any one on himself; by merely keeping the lids apart by an effort of the will, when the end of the finger may be placed boldly on the eyeball, without any inconvenience. Inflammation, by enlarging the blood-vessels, gives rise to pain in the same way, and the sensation is at first as if some extraneous matter were interposed between the lids.” \*

From the explanation now given, it will readily, I presume, be understood why diseases of the eye have so long formed a

\* Guthrie's Lectures on the Operative Surgery of the Eye.—London, 1823.

separate branch of the surgical profession, as if no man could be a good oculist who did not limit his practice to that branch alone. This *peculiar sensibility* of the eye not being understood, every one, however ill qualified, who had boldness enough to operate, succeeded in a way which surprised himself even more perhaps than the ignorant spectators. "Oh," says the patient, "what a clever man that must be: why, I declare *I hardly felt him all the time!*" "What a *light hand* he must have!" says another. "How bad my case must have been," whines out a third, "when even under his care my poor eye could not be saved!"—Though, by the bye, that eye may have been lost entirely by the oculist's want of knowledge; for, with all this freedom which the insensibility of the organ allows it to be treated with, still its diseases can only be well managed on the principles of general surgery. My meaning is, that a mere oculist, such as are many of the itinerant practitioners in that line, cannot possibly treat complaints of the eye so well as one who, to a local knowledge of the organ and its diseases, joins a knowledge of surgery, and medicine in general. The oculist, indeed, may have much self-command and expertness in operating; but, in a large proportion of cases, the operation is, to use a common phrase, only "half the battle;" and final success must depend on proper after-treatment, constitutional, as well as local. I have read an anecdote bearing somewhat on this subject.—An oculist, who resided in London, had performed many successful, and, as some supposed, almost miraculous operations. He acquired both fame and practice; but, in the midst of this fortunate career, it unluckily occurred to him, that, as he had done so well on the small capital of knowledge he possessed, he ought to do still better were that capital enlarged. With this view, he put himself under the tuition of the celebrated Dr. Hunter; and what was the consequence? The oculist wanted nerve; and, though he had dashed on fearlessly, when neither danger nor difficulty was foreseen, yet, no sooner had he imbibed a fuller draught of knowledge, than he was panic-struck to the heart, and never again ventured to operate on the visual orbs.

There are few affections, then, more painful than that which arises from the presence of a foreign body between the eyelids. The occurrence is generally known at the time, and some people are very expert at removing such a body from this situation. If the object can be seen, there will seldom be much difficulty in removing it; though, when a spark from a smith's forge sticks in the eye-ball, its removal is not easy. A quill cut like a pen to a fine point, is the best instrument we can use. A bodkin will often answer very well; or the head of a pin, the point of a pencil, &c. &c. Grains of gun-

powder require much care and patience to displace them. When quick-lime gets into the eye, the disorganization produced is so rapid, that the eye scarcely ever escapes. We are told not to apply water, which, by mixing with the lime, would cause it to be spread more generally over the organ; and therefore we are recommended to use oil. But oil is seldom at hand, and water, if properly applied, is the best remedy. The patient should be instantly laid on his back, the eyelids be kept forcibly distended, and a *full stream* of water from the strop of a jug or kettle be played upon the cornea, or clear part of the eye, (which it is of most importance to preserve,) till the lime is completely washed away from the organ.—I do not at present recollect any farther observations on this subject, which could be of service to the general reader; but, I shall take the opportunity of recommending to the young surgeon, that, when he is consulted in cases of ophthalmia, he should be well satisfied that the inflammation does not proceed from some foreign body in the eye. Should this be the cause of the inflammation, all the washes, leechings, blisterings, &c. which he may prescribe, will not remove the complaint. They may palliate, indeed, but will not cure. It is sometimes difficult to detect foreign bodies so situated, on account of their minuteness, and semi-transparency. It has happened too, that a patient has been teased with many applications, and with consultation after consultation; and at last the whole complaint has been discovered to proceed from a small hair, growing out of the coats of the eye, or of the *caruncula lachrymalis*—that little, projecting, red fleshy mass which lies in the inner angle of the eye. But bodies of comparatively large size, have sometimes lain concealed for a long time, and put the patient to great torture. A clergyman in Scotland passing through a hedge, fell; and was confined for a long time afterwards, with violent inflammation of one of his eyes. It was at length ascertained that a piece of a twig, half an inch long, was lodged under the upper eyelid, at its uppermost verge.

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#### THE MAN OF THREESCORE.

I know a man whose years have reached threescore,  
 Whose eyes are faded, and whose locks are hoar;  
 Whose heart the pangs of secret grief hath known—  
 He once was wealthy, but his wealth is gone;  
 Whose memory broods o'er joys that are away—  
 His bosom friend is withering in the clay.

This widowed man, whose years have reached  
 threescore,  
 Whose eyes are faded, and whose locks are hoar,  
 Hath comforts yet for his bereaved mind—  
 Even sons and daughters dutiful and kind;

And comforts too by holier hands bestowed—  
 His soul reposes on the word of God.

I love this man whose years have reached three-  
 score,  
 Whose eyes are faded, and whose locks are hoar;  
 And now it is the highest wish I know,  
 To stay his coming years, to sooth his wo,  
 To cheer the evening shades of life that gather  
 Around his drooping head—**HE IS MY FATHER.**

W. K.